

## “The Gospel in Isaiah 52 & 53” Part 2

Good morning, it's good to be sharing with you again. Last week we looked at the themes of justice and grace, starting in Exodus 34 where they are expressed as essential impulses in the character of God, and then we traced those themes through Isaiah. We saw that Isaiah forcefully displays the tension God feels when faced with the problem of mankind's sin, simultaneously wanting to forgive the iniquity of sinners and hold them accountable for their sin. In the first 35 chapters of Isaiah this is particularly clear, as God bounces back and forth between promises of coming wrath and promises of coming redemption. And we concluded by seeing that Isaiah 53 provides the answer to the question: how is God going to satisfy both his need for justice and his need for grace?

The answer of Isaiah 53 is that a faultless, faithful Servant of the Lord will come, bear the undeniable justice of God in the place of sinners, so that sinners can experience the grace God is undeniably compelled to offer. For Isaiah's audience this Servant was a mysterious, and, as we'll see this morning, a fairly confounding figure, but for us the Servant has a name, and it's Jesus of Nazareth. And that is the reality we are going to explore together this morning. Go ahead and open to Isaiah 53 in your Bibles, if you haven't already, we'll actually be starting at 52:13. While you're turning there, I'd like to explain an important literary device that pertains to this passage, and that is the device of chiasm. A chiasm is a set of parallel literary units that come to a point. Perhaps the easiest way to understand it is to think of an arrow. In the chiasmic structure literary unit 1 corresponds with the last unit in the chiasm, we'll have that be literary unit 5 for this example. So then, unit 2 would correspond with unit 4, and unit 3 would be the point. I imagine, just from looking at this picture you can guess why an author would employ a chiasm; it's a way of indicating the main point you're trying to make while incorporating supporting thoughts. Well, the Servant Song found in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 forms a chiasm. I share all of this to give you a visual aid for how we're going to work through the passage this morning. We're going to work our way from the ends of the arrow to its point, as I think it will drive home the main message of this passage most forcefully. Let's begin by reading Isaiah 52:13-15.

“Behold, my servant shall act wisely; He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you—His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the children of mankind—so shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of Him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.” These first few verses serve as an introductory statement concerning who the Servant is, what He will do, and what His actions will accomplish. Verse 13 begins by making clear that this Servant of Lord will know what He's doing, and God will honor Him for it. To act wisely, biblically, means to live in accordance with how God intended man to live, and to understand His reality so as to act in such a way that you can achieve an intended result. So, the first statement about the Servant describes Him as wise and honored, which makes the next few lines shocking.

Verse 14 goes on to describe the Servant experiencing severe suffering. So severe that He will be unrecognizable. It will be suffering so bad that those who see it will be astonished or horrified by it. Because of this, verses 13 and 14 are somewhat confusing when taken together, and verse 15 only adds to the confusion as it says that many will be blessed as a result of this suffering. The Hebrew word that the ESV translates “sprinkle” in verse 15 is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe making people or things holy, or cleansing away uncleanness, or atoning for sin. It is used quite a bit in the description of the worship practices of the Tabernacle and Temple, in which items and people would be purified by the sprinkling of blood. This is what the Servant's suffering will accomplish, the sprinkling of many nations. And so, there will be kings humbled into silence at the unexpected blessing of salvation that will come as a result of the Servant's suffering. On their own, these verses raise more questions

than they answer in the immediate context, especially for Isaiah's audience. Of course, it's all but impossible for our minds not to be drawn to the Gospel at this point. In John, for instance, Jesus repeatedly said He would be "lifted up", referring to the cross, which is where He would be marred beyond recognition and spill the blood that would sprinkle souls from many nations making them holy, clean, and pure. And this is the explanation we find by looking at the verses that correspond with 52:13-15. Let's read Isaiah 53:10-12.

"Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide Him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors." One question that would arise from the first group of verses we read might be, "How could God let such horrible suffering happen to His Servant? Surely, that can't have been His intention!" Well, 53:10 would correct that misunderstanding. It is explicit here that the suffering of the Servant was according to the will of God. Which might make the natural next question be, "Why? For what purpose?"

Verse 10 goes on to say it was for the purpose of atoning for the guilt of sin. It also says that this act of sacrifice will produce an offspring, which should cause our minds to jump to Ephesians 1 which says we are made a part of God's family on the basis of Christ's atoning work on the cross, and Romans 8 which says Jesus would be the firstborn of many brothers. These passages show that Jesus' sacrifice created a family. Not only that but verse 10 also alludes to the fact that the Servant will not stay dead, rather His days will be "prolonged", and He will use them to prosper the will of the Lord. This, alluding to Christ's resurrection and sovereign reign over all things.

Verses 11 and 12 double down on this hopeful twist to the Servant's suffering. 11 showing the Servant will be satisfied as He sees His anguish pay off in the making of many righteous, just as 2 Cor. 5:21 says, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." And verse 12 of Isaiah 53 says that the Servant will be rewarded by God, paralleling the earlier statements from 52:13 that He would be honored. The Servant was numbered with the transgressors, He identified with sinners to bear their sin, and now makes intercession for them. This brings to mind Romans 8:34 which says, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." And so it is that Isaiah 53:10-12 makes sense of Isaiah 52:13-15. Jesus, the servant, was exalted, first in His suffering on the cross, but ultimately to His heavenly throne. He suffered brutally, according to the will of God, but it was for the purpose of clearing guilt and producing a righteous offspring to His own satisfaction and joy. His suffering sprinkled many, making them holy, clean, and forgiven, and that sprinkling continues as He intercedes on behalf of the many whose sins He bore. Going back to the front of the chiasm, we find a description of Servant's life in 53:1-3. "Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."

Verse 1 asks a couple of rhetorical questions that will make more sense once we get to verse 2. But before we move there, it's important to understand that the reference to "the arm of the Lord" is a

reference to God Himself. A couple chapters earlier in Isaiah 51:9-10 this same phrase is used to describe God's work of bringing Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. And then the phrase occurs in Isaiah 52:10, in which it is promised that God will bare His arm again in a new work of salvation. So, what we learn from the use of this phrase is that the Servant, will be the Lord Himself coming to bring about salvation. And yet, verse 2 uses human language to describe the coming Servant. The Servant, who is the eternal, immutable Lord, will grow! And now we can understand the question of verse 1, "Who has believed what He has heard from us?" In other words, who's going to believe the Servant is somehow both God and man?

Verse 3 then makes it clear that many if not most, will not believe. The Servant will be regarded as unremarkable, at best according to verse 2, and He will be despised, at worst according to verse 3. Many will not understand who this Servant truly is, and so they will not esteem Him. I'm sure I hardly need to offer any comment about how this aligns with Jesus, the God-man who was born in obscurity, lived an unremarkable existence as a carpenter for most of His life, and was despised and rejected even once He was well-known. So normal was He, that people in His hometown took offense at His teaching, as we see in Mark 6:3 in which they complain, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him." So, from verses 1-3 we get a picture of Jesus' life and ministry, and then verses 7-9 describe His death. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. By oppression and judgment, He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth." The first thing we see in verse 7 is that although it was the will of the Lord to crush Him, as we saw in verse 10, the Servant is willing to be crushed. Though the Servant knows His suffering is unjust, He does not protest. He's so willing that He is as quiet as a lamb that doesn't know it's about to be sacrificed, even though the wise Servant, would know exactly what was going on. The suffering of Jesus was not a case of divine child abuse, it was a joint display of unfathomably sacrificial love in which the Father was willing to sacrifice His Son, and the Son was willing to be sacrificed.

It is clear in the Gospels that Jesus knew exactly how His life would end, and yet when put through the farce of His trial He was silent before His accusers, because He knew what He was doing in partnership with His Father. As He says in John 10:18, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." Jesus was willing. Verse 8 of Isaiah 53 describes the miscarriage of justice that would lead to the Servant's death. Jesus, we know, was unfairly tried, and condemned. Not only that, but many of His generation simply thought His death was the result of clashing with the powers of the day and had no idea His death was actually due to the transgressions of men. And verse 9 places the righteous Servant in the grave of the many wicked for whom He died, even though He Himself had done no violence and uttered no deceit.

Now we reach the point of the arrow, verses 4-6, which is the part of this passage Isaiah wants to emphasize, because it tells us exactly what the Servant of the Lord would come to accomplish. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Verse 4 contrasts what the Servant would do for us with how we would misinterpret it. This comes on the heels of Isaiah saying the Servant would be a man of sorrows, but those sorrows would not

simply be His own, according to this verse, rather they would be our griefs and sorrows that He would choose to bear in our stead. And yet, from the outside it would look as though he were being afflicted by God, as such griefs and sorrows were taken to indicate at the time. Matthew 8:16-17 says that Jesus fulfilled this verse in His healing ministry. And one of the most common words used to describe Jesus' healing ministry and ministry to the crowds is "compassion", which carries the idea of "suffering with". You see, Jesus didn't just heal, He didn't just remove grief and pain, He felt the pain and grief of the wounded and grieved, bearing that pain and grief with and for us. And yet, at the end of the day, we didn't esteem Him, we rejected Him. That rejection took the form of a piercing, which is what Isaiah says would happen to the Servant in verse 5. This is the heart of the heart of this passage. The Servant would take the piercing and crushing our transgressions and iniquities deserved. He, who never did anything wrong, would be chastised by the divine Judge, while those who can hardly breathe without wrongdoing would enjoy peace with God. He, who had done no violence, would be mortally wounded, while those who commit violence in thought, word, and deed would be healed. This is the meat of what the Servant would come to accomplish, making the way, as we discussed last week, for both God's justice and grace to be completely satisfied. Brothers and sister, Jesus was pierced on *our* cross, was crushed by and for *our* sin, heard *our* chastisement, and was afflicted with *our* wounds.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." We went astray, every one of us, thinking we knew better than God, and yet God took the weight of all our failure and put it on Him. Again, "For our sake [God] made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." The arrow of Isaiah 52 and 53 points to a grand reversal: the righteous Servant taking the punishment for sin, so that the unrighteous many could have the blessings of His perfect righteousness. The epidemic of that reversal is seen in the Cross. The cross where Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, where He was mortally wounded so that we might be immortally healed. Where Jesus was crushed beneath the just wrath that our iniquities had kindled, bearing the divine and terrible chastisement of God so that we might enjoy perfect peace with the Father forever. Isaiah makes it clear that the avalanche of God's justice is coming, but Isaiah 52 and 53 proclaim there is a way to escape it. And the whole of Scripture points to it. There is an ark to carry us through that cleansing flood of justice. There is a cleft in the rock in which we may hide and be protected from the consuming glory of God. There is a refuge to protect us from the chaos of the storm. It's all pointing to Jesus.

The One who bore the justice of God, that we might have the grace of God. Who bore the wrath of God, that we might have the Father's love. Who paid our debt, that we might have an inheritance. Who died the death of sin, that we might be raised to the eternal life of righteousness. Jesus, who was lifted up, marred beyond recognition, and sprinkled many nations. Jesus, the arm of the Lord, who grew up as a man, but was despised and rejected. Jesus, who bore our grief and pain, was pierced, crushed, chastised, and wounded, carrying our iniquities. Jesus, who, though innocent, opened not His mouth in the face of unjust oppression and judgement, and died with the wicked. Jesus, whose death was an offering for guilt, that led to us being His offspring accounted righteous by His righteousness, for whom He now intercedes, even as He enjoys the honor and reward His sacrifice so mightily deserves. Jesus. Do you know Him? If you don't, He wants to meet you today, to take your guilt, your brokenness, your burden, and to give you His righteousness, wholeness, and rest. If you do know Him, don't you want to know Him more? Don't you want to grow in the knowledge of His love for you? O, that we would only have the strength to comprehend together, what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. So great is the love of God for us in Christ, we will never fully comprehend it though we will spend eternity exploring that love, and so, the most appropriate response to His love is to simply worship Him for it, which we're going to do.